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ABSTRACT

In recent years, collaboration has become a powerful tool in the writing classroom and in how teachers teach students to write, but there has been little research on how to enact collaborative techniques to help train teachers how to teach. An experiment was conducted in which potential secondary teachers collaboratively taught an introductory literature course for first-year students, receiving feedback on their teaching from each other, the first-year students, and the professor. Both the graduate student teachers in one survey and the freshmen students in two surveys reported their reactions and evaluations of the collaborative effort. Overall, the graduate students found the experience to be extremely positive. The first-year students' responses, though mostly positive, were not as enthusiastic as those of the graduate students. Many of the negative comments focused on grading, money, status, and a concern about the validity of the student teacher's knowledge. Some students felt that they were somehow being cheated. The students recognized the advantages of multiple perspectives, yet ironically the view of the teacher as sole authority surfaced. Overall, the students enjoyed having a role in training future teachers, while the potential teachers were eager and grateful to have the opportunity to teach a literature class. (HB)

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Conference on College Composition and Communication

Teachers of Teachers:
Enacting Collaborative Techniques
in the Training of Secondary School Teachers

Lulu C. H. Sun

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In recent years, collaboration has become a powerful tool in the writing classroom and in how we teach our students to write. However, there has been little research on how to enact collaborative techniques to help train teachers how to teach. Since many of our future teachers will be using collaboration in their classes, it is crucial that training methods reflect collaborative processes. Hence, I conducted an experiment in which I trained potential teachers by means of collaboration between these teachers and first-year university students. Graduate students preparing for teaching at the secondary level collaboratively taught a literature course for first-year students where a three-way interactive process occurred. The first-year students shared with the potential teachers their reactions about the latter's teaching, the teachers shared their experiences as well as helped one another with their teaching materials, and both the students and teachers reported their reactions and impressions to me and asked for my input.

As part of the course requirements, graduate students registered in "Teaching Literature" for the M. A. in Writing were required to do student teaching. The students were required to teach one class of English 120, "Understanding Literature," an Introduction to Literature course. They could teach the class using any of the methodologies we had discussed in class--for example, lecturing, discussion, small-group work, etc. They then reported their experiences and findings to the rest of the class so that we could all learn and benefit from their experiences. In addition, the first-year students continually shared their

thoughts with me and the graduate student teachers either verbally or through questionnaires. Two major surveys were conducted with the first-year students--one during the middle of the term and one at the end of the term--and one survey with the graduate students at the end of the term. In total, three questionnaires were conducted.

Overall, the graduate students feel the experience was extremely positive. They find that "there is no substitute for hands-on-experience." "It has to remain on the syllabus." "I really need the experience. Helped me overcome fears, gain knowledge, etc." "Helped me to appreciate learning literature--it changed my perceptions." "I got to try my hand at actual teaching." "I realized there are many ways to do things and I studied hard to find a method that would be helpful."

The graduate students would like to teach more, to team teach, and work closer together. They feel that it is beneficial for first-year students to get different perspectives on various works, teaching styles, methods, and opinions. "They have to realize that there is no one authority and what we have to say is valid." "It might be a good idea to place each grad student in a separate section of 120, branch out to other sections." "You should keep the experiment--they, the perspective teachers, absolutely need this experience, especially since most of us don't have much actual experience." "I would like to see other teachers involved for additional help and guidance by working with their classes."

In response to the question "A small minority of the English

120 students feel that student teaching is more beneficial to the student teachers than it is to them. How would you respond to this concern," the graduate students feel that "I would suggest that it is beneficial for students to get different perspectives on various works." "Explain that everyone benefits. Learning is not a process of memorizing one person's beliefs, insights, etc." "It is beneficial to the student teachers. But this doesn't contradict being beneficial to them if their attitude is open and receptive." The experience was extremely satisfying and educational for the graduate students who feel both parties benefited from the collaboration. But the most interesting part of the study is some of the reactions of the first-year students. For the remainder of the presentation, I'm going to focus on the first-year students.

Although the first-year students' responses are mostly positive, they are not as enthusiastic as the graduate students'. The first questionnaire conducted with the first-year students generated the following responses. "Do you like the idea of student teachers teaching the class" is the first question I asked. "Yes, it is both helpful to them, i.e., they get some direct experience and for us because they are younger and their experience is still fresher." "Yes, because it gives the class a chance to experience different methods of teaching the same subject. By having student teachers, the class gets the opportunity to get a different viewpoint (or interpretation) about a written work." "It also shows me the 'roots' of a teacher." "The idea is good because it gives us a fresh

perspective on the material." "Having multiple instructors is always a plus."

Many of the negative comments focus on grades, money, status, and a concern about the validity of the student teachers' information: "I feel that we need to know your opinion of the poems, not a student teacher's, to pass your exams." "I hope the information we have received from the student teachers will be relevant. If the final will be based only on your ideas and info, then student teachers definitely should not be here at all." "No, I think it hurt my grade because I could not interact in discussions." "I don't really like the idea because in a way I feel cheated. My parents are paying good money for me to go to school and I prefer to have an experienced professional instructor." "I'd rather have a 'real' teacher teaching since I'm paying so much to go to school." "I feel that student teaching should be done at a secondary level of education. I pay good money for top notch professors, not people who are only a few years older than me." "I like the idea but not in my class." What emerges from some of these answers is a mercenary attitude toward learning and education and the students' concern that they are being cheated somehow. There is also a concern that the student teachers may not have the right perspective or answer that I would want them to have.

In response to the question "What do you perceive to be the advantages and disadvantages, or positive and negative aspects, of having student teachers teach the class," almost all the students mention the advantages of having different perspectives

and interpretations from different teachers. Here is a sampling: "We can see different styles of teaching." "The advantages for us are that we get a different perception of the texts. The different ideas may help us more easily understand the material." "The biggest advantage is having someone with a potentially different perspective teach us." "We can experience different interpretations of literary works with someone closer to our own age." "New ideas." "Multiple viewpoints."

Ironically however, even while the first-year students recognize the advantages of having different perspectives, the teacher as the sole authority surfaces. Some of the students want to be told what is right and they want it to come from an authority figure. "The disadvantages is that we may not learn what the regular teacher wants us to know." "We may not get out of the readings what you had intended, due to their different perspective." "The disadvantages is not having the literary work interpreted by an experienced professor and possibly being taught the written works incorrectly." The issue of the difference between a professor's knowledge and a student teacher's knowledge emerges. "They don't know as much as the real teacher does." "We may be tested on the literature from Dr. Sun's point of view, even though we studied the literature from the student teachers' point of view." "Student teachers are not at the point in their careers where they could help us understand the material. They have no respect." "We can't relate topics discussed about a poem/story to another because the teacher was different." "If this person made a mistake, it was at our expense." All these

comments illustrate that the first-year students are unable to see themselves as authority figures. They are not able to really collaborate because they do not see themselves in a position to do so.

In response to the question, "How effective are the student teachers in helping you to understand the texts? Do you doubt their knowledge of the materials they are teaching," I received a variety of answers. "They do very good jobs. I think they research the material a lot so they can gain better experience." "I do not doubt their knowledge, they would not be here if someone doubted their knowledge." "Pretty effective, they seem to know what they are talking about. I don't really doubt their knowledge, it's just that I trust the regular teacher more, after all she is the one who makes up the exams." "I often do doubt their knowledge. I'm sure they have done research for our class, but you have studied much more than they have, and are therefore more knowledgeable." For some of the students, experience is equated with knowledge. "Just the fact that they are student teachers makes me doubt their word."

In response to the question, "Are there any changes you would like me to make regarding the student teaching," again I received a wide spectrum of answers. "Not really." "I think the way you do it is fine, only jump in when necessary." "I think everything was done perfectly, there should be no changes." "No, I think this present situation is fine." "Find another outlet for the students to teach in." "I think a curve on the final grade would be expected." "Discontinue. Let them teach at high

school or grade schools where they plan to work anyway." "I don't feel we should have to be subjected to them." Perhaps the most enlightening, illuminating, and revealing comments are these: "Make sure you review your interpretation at the end." "Get together with them and be sure they have the ideas you want us to pick up in their presentations." "Let them teach for half the class and then you can go back over the material." "You should not only have them prepare your lecture, but also prepare a brief outline of what you would like him/her to cover as well."

In response to the question, "The next time I teach the graduate seminar (that is, prepare and train potential secondary school or college teachers), do you think I should have student teachers teach an introductory literature or composition class? Why or why not?" I received these answers. "I think it is alright, it gives them practice, and gives us another viewpoint and approach to our work." "Yes, because it gives them the opportunity to gain some teaching experience with a class that would probably be more understanding than a high school class." "Yes, maintain the format, because we really need quality teachers." "Yes and no. It would be good experience for the student teacher. But students might not like the idea of a student teaching a class." "It is good experience for them but my tuition dollars are paying for your doctorate faculty position." "I'm not sure. I like being taught by a person with a Ph. D. I feel like that's why I'm paying so much money." Not a single student addressed the question of whether student teachers should teach a literature or a composition course.

The second questionnaire was conducted at the end of the term. The responses did not change significantly from the ones expressed in the first questionnaire. The second questionnaire has two extra questions. These are the answers to the question "How can you or I help the student teachers more in their training? What suggestions would you give them? Do you think you should also evaluate their teaching?" "I think we should evaluate them, it would add insight to your training of them." "We should not evaluate their teaching more than this form. We are not knowledgeable enough of the art of teaching to be critical." "Evaluations would probably be a good idea in helping them in their training. I think that the only way a teacher can know whether the teaching is effective is from the students themselves." "I'm really in no position to be able to judge their teaching skills or offer suggestions." "Allowing the student teachers to teach in a real classroom is the best way for them to learn how to teach effectively." "Students can help student teachers a lot by raising questions on material being covered."

The answers on evaluating the student teachers are diverse, contradictory, and rather ironic. On the one hand, the first-year students say they are not in a position to evaluate and judge the student teachers, that they cannot evaluate them, but on the other hand, they did evaluate them, whether intentionally or unintentionally, in their answers to the questionnaires. Again, this points to the first-year students' inability to see themselves as an authority. They are not seeing and realizing

that they are in fact collaborating.

The final question is "the next time I teach the graduate seminar (that is, prepare and train potential secondary school or college teachers), do you think I should place student teachers in other sections of English 120?" The following are some of the responses. "I think this class is a good starter for them." "I think they should be restricted to poetry." "It gives them experience, but it's a limited source of experience." "I like the idea. Stay with it." "Literature instead of composition is a better class to teach because there is more interaction between student and teacher." "I think it's good experience for both parties to work together."

A number of intertwining themes and concerns emerge and are repeated again and again. One of them is that the students do recognize the need for the teachers to learn how to teach and they are open to collaboration. However, they are also resistant to it. They are concerned about getting the right material, the right information, and their performance in the course. Another theme is that the students want an authority figure telling them what to do, what to think, and what is the right answer. Although they recognize multiple readings of the same texts, the comments on the questionnaires indicate that they want to know what is the "correct" reading. What is interesting is that they have the language, the vocabulary--words like "multiple viewpoints," "perspectives," and "texts." There is tension within the students themselves--they would like to be open to collaboration, yet they are wary of the concept. "Am I getting

my money's worth, am I getting what I'm supposed to learn" are the questions they are asking. So one of the questions we educators have to ask is how do we teach collaboration or enact collaborative techniques in a setting like this? What does it mean then to have collaboration when students are resistant to it? Are there ways to overcome the first-year students' problems with and bias against collaboration? These are some of the questions wandering in my mind.

To summarize, the graduate students, as part of their learning process, were able to apply the various theories and methodologies they had learned in their graduate class to practice while the majority of the first-year students indicated they enjoyed and benefited from the collaboration as they were exposed to different teaching styles, personalities, and interpretations. They realized that there are multiple readings of the same texts. For some, the professor was no longer perceived as the sole repository of knowledge. However, a small minority was concerned about the student teachers' lack of teaching experience, knowledge, and expertise in the areas they were teaching.

Overall, the experiment involved more than student teachers teaching a class: it entailed constant feedback from the first-year students at every stage of the study. The collaboration empowered the students as well as the potential teachers. The students had a role in helping to train and develop future teachers while the potential teachers were eager, and grateful, to have had the opportunity of teaching an entire class.